

Tech Talk: Race and Ethnicity – from the March 2012 CSDC Network News

The tabulation of race and ethnicity in census products is a confusing concept for users. If you do not pay attention, you will double count some people or exclude others.

“Race” and “Ethnicity” are two different concepts with their own questions on the decennial census and ACS questionnaires. Let’s look at each concept and then explore what they mean for users in California.

Race:

The U.S. Census Bureau collects race data in accordance with guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). These data are based on self-identification by the individual respondent. The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect the social definition of race recognized in this country and are not an attempt to define race biologically, genetically, or anthropologically.

Starting with the 2000 census, an individual may mark more than one race to indicate a racial mixture, such as “American Indian” and “White”. Therefore, racial data from censuses prior to 2000 are not directly comparable to the data collected in 2000 and beyond.

The mutually exclusive race groups for which data are normally tabulated include:

- White alone
- Black or African American alone
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone
- Asian alone
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone
- Some other race alone
- Two or more races

The “alone” categories count persons who selected only that major race group; the “Two or more races” category counts persons who report more than one major race group. Respondents who select more than one detailed race within a single major race group, however, are not counted in the “Two or more races” group. For example, someone who selected “Japanese” and “Chinese” will be included in the “Asian Alone” category, not in “Two or more races”.

Users can get into trouble, however, when looking at data tables that include people who reported one race only and people who reported more than one race. These counts are labeled “alone or in combination” and are referred to as “tallies” in census tables. For example, the “White alone or in combination” category

consists of those respondents who reported “White”, whether or not they reported any other races. For example, people who reported only “White” and those who reported combinations such as “White” and “Black or African American,” or “White” and “Asian” and “American Indian and Alaska Native,” are included in the “White alone or in combination” category. Someone who selected the races “White” and “Black or African American” will be counted twice – once in “White alone or in combination” and again in “Black alone or in combination.” **As a result, the sum of race groups in tables including the “in combination” tallies will exceed the total population for the geographic area.**

Ethnicity:

In accordance with the OMB definition of ethnicity, the Census Bureau provides data for the two basic categories in the OMB standards: “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino.” In general, the Census Bureau defines ethnicity or origin as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. **People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race.**

Combining Race and Ethnicity:

In California, most users and programs consider Hispanics equivalent to a race group. They want to see mutually exclusive data for the major race groups and Hispanics.

Unfortunately, these categories can be very difficult to find because the Census Bureau usually releases data for the following groups:

- White alone*
- Black or African American alone*
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone*
- Asian alone*
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone*
- Some other race alone*
- Two or more races*
- Hispanics
- White alone, not Hispanic

Be careful! These groups are NOT mutually exclusive – the first seven groups, which are in *italics* above, already include Hispanics. If you added these groups plus Hispanics to look at the population distribution by race/ethnicity, it will sum to more than the total population (more than 100%). To count Hispanics only once, you must use data for each major race group that excludes Hispanics, noted as “Not Hispanic”. But race categories excluding Hispanic

tabulations are not always available. The only race group typically provided in census tabulations is "White alone, not Hispanic." In the 2010 census, less than half of Hispanics were White.

Finding Data for the "Not Hispanic" Race Groups:

In the 2010 Census Summary File 1, only age and sex data are available by "Not Hispanic" race groups. These tables are PCT12H through PCT12O. We need to wait for Summary File 2 for more data. Summary File 2 will provide Summary File 1 type data for each race/ethnicity group. The limitation will be that each geographic area must have at least 100 persons in that race/ethnicity group to have tabulations published in the file.

So far, the ACS tabulations have been released with only one "Not Hispanic" race group, "White alone, not Hispanic." The Census Bureau plans to release 2006-2010 ACS 5-year estimates in a format similar to Summary File 4 from the 2000 Census. We hope this file will be released in May 2012. At this time we do not know the geographic levels that will be released.

Race and ethnicity are important characteristics for census data users. But the user must use caution to make sure they have the combination that correctly fits their data needs.